

**Testimony on behalf of
The Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, Inc.
Before the Committee on Children
February 7, 2023**

House Bill 6574 - An Act Concerning Municipal Youth Camps

The Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, Inc. (CRPA) is a nonprofit charitable organization. Our mission is to support the recreation and park profession and steward the future of public parks and recreational opportunities in Connecticut in order to promote active lifestyles, livable communities, and quality of life for all who call Connecticut home. CRPA represents over 760 individual professionals from municipal, nonprofit, and private, park, recreation, and camp organizations, as well as approximately 134 of the 169 municipal park and recreation departments in Connecticut.

CRPA appreciates the efforts of the Committee on Children to further ensure the safety of children however, we oppose House Bill 6574 as it will increase costs to municipalities, reduce the availability of local and affordable childcare that our residents have come to depend on when school is out for the summer. Furthermore, this bill, if adopted, may impose conditions on municipal park and recreation departments that cannot be met and may result in some of these programs ceasing to operate.

We oppose the mandate that municipal youth camps comply with licensure requirements administered through the Office of Early Childhood. Municipal camps already have several layers of oversight that private camps do not. This oversight includes: full-time, year-round Program Coordinators and Park and Recreation Directors, Risk Managers, HR Directors, Town Attorneys, and Town Managers. Additionally, our camps answer to their local Mayors and First Select Persons and ultimately to their local residents.

Municipal Camps are Safe Camps

The exemption of municipal camps from licensure has existed since these requirements were enacted many years ago and there have been no reported incidences of issues at these camps. Our local park and recreation departments ensure the safety of camp participants by:

- Conducting background checks on all staff;
- Ensuring required medical information is completed by parents through online software;
- Needed medical administration is done by med admin certified camp staff in compliance with the requirements established by the State Department of Public Health;
- Annually training camp staff on items such as but not limited to safety procedures and plans, mandated reporter training, social emotional learning, and inclusion.

Increased Costs and Administrative Burden

Requiring the municipal camp in your town or city to be licensed under OEC will not result in safer camps but will result in more expensive camps by:

- Increasing the administrative work required of municipal park and recreation departments;
- Require the hiring of additional administrative staff, using scarce resources that would better serve our children elsewhere, such as with additional hands-on camp staff and programming;

- Requiring towns and cities to consult with and have an APRN or physician on-call (these are increasingly hard to find);
- Spending an additional \$68 on background checks per person (from \$20 to the State's \$88.25);
- Additional facility requirements unavailable at municipal locations;
- Increasing onsite staff requirements, both in quantity and age:

The staffing and age requirements outlined in the licensing regulations will require many camps to either reduce hours of operation or combine camp sites to comply, reducing needed summer childcare slots statewide. For example, a town or city camp offering extended day (both before and after camp care), would be required to employ at least four 21-year-old directors per site each day to cover the required shifts. If a municipality were to operate 5 sites to provide citywide access, the number of 21-year-old staff needed each day would be 20.

Quite frankly, there are not enough qualified candidates at this age range willing to work at summer park and recreation programs.

The consequence of this bill will be cities and towns reducing the hours of operation, consolidating camp site locations, reducing the number of campers and/or simply eliminating their programs. All of these consequences limit access to essential childcare. Municipalities currently provide one of the most affordable childcare options to their local residents. This can have an impact on economic development as parents then cannot work. The state already has these issues in our rural areas.

As the cost of childcare in Connecticut continues to rise due to increases in the minimum wage, increased insurance costs, and record gas and utility prices, the programming offered by our towns and cities is needed now more than ever. Rather than increasing costs and administrative paperwork, we should look for opportunities to increase the amount and scope of programming offered by local park and recreation programs.

HB 6574 is a solution in search of a problem. It unnecessarily burdens municipalities with excessive amounts of paperwork, mandates expensive contracts to have either an APRN or physician on retainer, mandates facility requirements, increases the cost and time-frame needed to run background checks by creating a state-run monopoly of background check companies and thus exponentially increases the cost of summer childcare to the most affordable programs offered throughout the state – those run by municipal governments. It would also increase the Care4Kids waitlist since all municipal programs would now become eligible to accept this funding.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to working with the committee on this issue.

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